1: Bowen C-4 (1945-1947) 1951 Maritime Arabs MKS

THE PEARL FISHERIES OF THE PERSIAN GULF

Richard LeBaron Bowen, Jr.

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THE MOST COLORFUL and widely publicized marine activity of the Persian Gulf is pearl fishing. Since time immemorial the Persian Gulf has been noted for its pearl beds, and Bahrein Island has always been famous for the best pearls. Virtually every ancient and early geographer or traveler writing about the Persian Gulf mentioned pearls and Bahrein Island. An ancient cuneiform tablet found at Ur of the Chaldees, and dated about 2000 B.C., refers to "a parcel of fish-eyes" from Dilmun; some scholars have interpreted this to mean pearls from Bahrein Island. Pliny, writing in the first century A.D., states that Tylos (the classical name for Bahrein Island) "is famous for the vast number of its pearls." *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea,* written by a Greek sailor about 60 A.D., mentions the Persian Gulf, "where there are many pearl fisheries." An Arab writing in 1050 A.D. states that "pearl fishing is carried on in the sea of Bahrein." In 1583 Ralph Fitch, an English merchant, visited the then famous island of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf and stated that there were "great stores of pearls which came from the Isle of Baharim, and are the best pearls of all others." Such a continuous record of fame is certainly extraordinary. If the "parcel of fish-eyes" sent to the Babylonians was actually pearls, it recorded the start of a continuous 4,000 years of testimony as to the quality of the Persian Gulf product.

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The factors governing the value of a pearl are multitudinous

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2: Villiers T-5 (1938-39) 1948 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2
Kuwait MI1

SOME ASPECTS OF THE ARAB DHOW TRADE

Alan Villiers

K 506 439

AT THE end of 1939, there were 106 large ocean-going dhows on the registry of the Persian Gulf port of Kuwait. They averaged about 100 tons, the largest being 300 and the smallest about 75 tons, by European standards. Their average value, at that time, was perhaps 10,000 rupees, the approximate equivalent of $3,000. They made trading voyages with Iraqi dates, loaded in the Basra river, to the coasts of India and East Africa, generally making either two Indian, or one East African, voyage annually. The majority were in the trade to India, with an occasional diversion to East Africa. From India they were accustomed to bring back shipbuilding materials, coir for cordage, and Malabar teak; from East Africa they brought mangrove poles from either the delta of the Rufiji River, in Tanganyika, or from the port of Lamu, in Kenya Colony. These poles were used for building, and the dimensions of the rooms in most of the Kuwait houses depended upon the length of the mangrove poles brought from East Africa.

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In addition to these deep-sea dhows, there were also, at that time, between 100 and 150 pearlers, and some 50 or 60 smaller dhows in the local trade to the Basra river, many of them engaged in bringing fresh water (for Kuwait has no satisfactory supply of its own). New vessels were building at the rate of two or three a month, for deep-sea, and a similar number for coastwise trade.

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The port of Kuwait was then, and is still, the principal dhow-

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† ALAN VILLIERS, deep-sea sailor and author, spent over twelve months in 1938–39 studying firsthand the Arab dhow trade of the Persian Gulf and the coasts of southern Arabia and East Africa. His experiences are described in his *Sons of Sinbad*, published in 1940; Mr. Villiers here presents further information on the socia. and economic aspects of the trade.

4: Bowen C-5 (1950) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

The Dhow Sailor[1]

BY RICHARD LeBARON BOWEN, JR.

I

SINCE time immemorial, cargo has been transported in sailing ships up and down the South Arabian and the East African coasts. As the medieval Sinbads and the ancients before them had done for countless centuries, so are the Arabs, Indians, and Persians today transporting cargo in sailing ships up and down these same shores. Today these sailors operate the last great fleet of deepwater sailing ships in the world, and because of the special circumstances, this fleet will probably sail on for many more centuries oblivious to the changing pace of life around it. Life for these modern sailors has changed little in the thousand years that have passed since the adventures of Sinbad the Sailor were recorded in *The Thousand and One Nights*.

The Arabs, Indians, and Persians are still able to sail their fleets of

[1] Credit for this article belongs in large part to Mr. Frederick Hunt, who, after reading the author's 'Arab Dhows of Eastern Arabia' in THE AMERICAN NEPTUNE, wrote to the Editor and asked if a follow-up might be possible, 'telling something of actual life aboard a dhow, how the crew lives, watches they stand, living conditions, what they eat, their wages, etc.' Mr. Hunt's outline has been followed almost to the letter, with some additional material added to round out the study.

Shortly after the first draft of the article was finished, the writer was very fortunate to become a member of the American Foundation for the Study of Man Arabian Expedition, which conducted archaeological investigations in South Arabia during the winter of 1950. Almost a month spent at Aden and on the south coast of Arabia, enabled the writer to collect much valuable additional first-hand data on the life of the dhow sailor. The writer is indebted to Mr. Wendell Phillips, leader of the expedition, for his assistance in making this particular phase of the study possible. The writer is deeply grateful to Prof. W. F. Albright, vice-president of the American Foundation for the Study of Man, for his guidance and assistance in numerous details in the work. The writer is also indebted to Dr. Philip K. Hitti for valuable advice on certain points.

In doing any work on the subject of dhows, one must consult what Alan Villiers has written on the subject. By sailing with the Arabs on their dhows for almost a full year Mr. Villiers has obtained an intimate picture of the dhow that the casual observer will completely miss, or the serious worker may not be able to get, as the Arabs are rather suspicious of Europeans who investigate their activities too closely. The writer of this present article has drawn on Villiers' material to round out certain aspects of this article and to supply various facts and figures for which Villiers alone is the source. Most of such material has been taken from his entertaining book, *Sons of Sinbad* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940), which in further reference will be abbreviated to A. Villiers, *SS*.

A description of the various types of dhows mentioned by their Arabic names in this article will be found in R. LeB. Bowen, Jr., 'Arab Dhows of Eastern Arabia,' AMERICAN NEPTUNE, IX (1949), 87-132, and R. LeB. Bowen, Jr., *Arab Dhows of Eastern Arabia* (Rehoboth: Privately printed, 1949).

4: Bowen C-5 (1950) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arab MK2

426 clean-cut in Villiers' case, as all the shares of the *nakhoda* and the mate
465 come from the crew's half of the net earnings. On the 240-ton *sambuk El Wafi*, which I boarded in Aden in 1950, the shares were as follows:[39]

	Value of Share	*Number of Shares*	*Total Shares*
Nakhoda (captain)	4	1	4
Serang (mate)	2	1	2
Sukkani (quartermaster or helmsman)	1½	3	4½
Muqaddam (boatswain)	1¼	1	1¼
Katib (clerk)	1½	1	1½
Wakil (steward)	1¼	1	1¼
Bakri or *mallah* (sailors)	1	33	33
Total shares			47½

In India some crews are paid on a salary basis, but many others work on a share basis. However, in India the owner takes one-third of whatever the ship earns. Then the craft's expenses while she was at sea and the supplies for the crew are deducted from the remaining two-thirds; the remainder is then divided among the captain and crew according to shares.[40] By dividing the profits in this manner the Indian owner gets about a quarter less than the Arab, while the Indian crew gets about ten per cent more.

471 The largest importer and exporter in Aden, and probably the whole
426 Gulf of Aden for that matter, is A. Besse and Company, operated by a
465 shrewd Frenchman, Mr. Antone Besse. Among Besse's various holdings in the Middle East are twelve dhows, all registered in Aden. The *El Wafi* was one of the twelve *sambuks* owned by A. Besse, and operated in the Gulf of Aden and the lower Red Sea. On the average these dhows made four trips a month. The *nakhoda* was given advances, which he in turn gave to the crew, before each trip. After four trips the gross return for

505 [39] It will be noted that the Arabic names in Villiers' list of the members of the crew on a Kuwait *bhum* and in my list of the members of the crew of an Aden *sambuk* are not the same; however,
104 this does not mean that either is necessarily wrong. The Arabic names on my list were checked from three independent sources in Aden, and my informants in Aden recognized Villiers' *mu'allim*
114 as the word the Kuwaiti used for 'mate.' Villiers indicated on his list 'quartermaster' but did not give the Arabic for the word. The Arabic word that I found in use in Aden for this member of the crew was *sukkani*, which comes from *sukkan*, the Arabic for 'rudder.' Thus it would seem that the more proper translation of the word is 'rudder-man' or 'helmsman,' although his position on the dhow is really that of 'quartermaster.' The word *muqaddam* is the word commonly used on land to refer to a 'headman' who is the leader of any other group of working-men. However, on a dhow the *muqaddam* is the man who superintends the letting go and the weighing of the anchor, so the translation of the word when applied to seafaring men is properly 'boatswain.' The important fact evident from the two lists is that there is always a consistency in the top officers of a dhow—there are a captain, a mate, three quartermasters (or helmsmen), and a boatswain, irrespective of the Arabic name by which they are known.

[40] K. B. Vaidya, op. cit., p. 41.